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MEMORIAL ADDRESS

DELIVERED BY

J. L. DOBBIN,

WAR DEPARTMENT.
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AT

BRAINERD, MINN.

May 30, 1895

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Comrades of the Grand Army, Ladies and Gentlemen:

This day fraught with so many sacred memories, dear to all and hallowed by its associations, again claims our tender solicitude.

We meet to attest our affection for our departed dead and to renew our vows to those they left behind.

Though all in love with life, cheerfully will the last remnant of our great Grand Army lay life's burdens down, if conscious that the remembrance of sacred trusts committed to our care shall continue to touch and move each loyal heart.

Of all the days of the year Memorial day is the most precious to the Union soldier. On this day memory leads us back again to the past. Imagination aids us, and our absent comrades are again with us; not in winding sheets nor burial shroud, but as they appeared in life;—the flush of health on their bronzed cheeks, their eyes flashing with all the fire and enthusiasm of youth; their hearts bounding with ambition and bright hope; we see them where duty calls and hear again their loud huzzas when the red field is won. We move again amidst their forms and reach out to grasp their hands in ours as they throng to our embrace. We cannot realize that so much of manhood and life and love is gone, nor can we realize that we too must soon join them to part no more forever.

This beautiful ceremony in which we engage has met with the almost universal approval of the American people, and loving hands today will garland with flowers many a grave, the occupant of which died "unknown;" not because they can be aided by these acts of tender affection, nor because a brighter luster may be shed on their well-merited glory, but in token of that debt of gratitude due them from every child of this Republic. How long the people of this country shall continue to observe this day must, in my judgment, depend largely upon the loyal people of the North. At one time I believed

that the South, appreciating the services of those brave men who not only secured liberty to the North and South alike, but made our government one and inseparable, would all unite with us in revering the memory of the Union soldier. In this, I am sorry to say, I have been disappointed.

A few days ago a re-union of the United Confederate Association was held at Houston, Texas. It is an organization similar in many respects to that of the Grand Army of the Republic. The historian of that body, speaking to the assembled multitude, urged upon them that they should exclude from the schools of the South all histories that did not place conspicuously, and in a more favorable light, the "lost cause," than those now in use. He claimed that many of the histories now used in the South were written by historians living in the North, and were inimical to the ideas for which they fought. He urged that it should be taught to, and known by their children, that in the struggle from '61 to '65, the Southern states were overpowered by superior numbers, while fighting for local self government. No more willful perversion of the truth could have been made. All then living knew exactly what they were fighting for. but the youth of the South and many in the North have not yet learned the truth. I had hoped that 30 years after the Rebellion none could be found, either North or South, who would indulge in such foolish and mendacious assertions, expecting them to be believed. All then living knew that the results of our last war were of far greater benefit to the South than to the North, for they had greater need of the blessings of civil liberty, and none should feel more profoundly grateful to the Union soldier than the people of that section known as the South.

Let it then be our chief care to teach our children and also those who come from other lands to make a home with us, that in the great struggle for liberty and union the North was right, and the South was absolutely and unqualifiedly wrong. And as we teach these things let us not forget to teach the duty

we owe to those men who risked their lives to perpetuate free government. Let us see to it that this day is not diverted from the use to which it was intended. Let us continue to make it a day which will inspire every American citizen with a more lofty appreciation of his government.

Another decade shall find but few of the Old Guard ready at the call of duty. Other lips must speak the words which shall thrill us with love of country; other hands must carry in the procession "Old Glory" to the cemetery, and weave the garlands of flowers to be laid upon the grassy mounds. I would be glad, if even now, the children and grandchildren of all good citizens of this republic would take charge of these ceremonies and make the silvery haired veterans their honored guests.

History informs us that nearly 2,400 years ago the semi-barbarous hordes of Asia, swept along by the full tide of power, determined to chastise and crush the Islands of Greece. The result of that determination was the battle of Marathon, which is given as the most wonderful that ever was fought, not only from the fact that a handful of Athenians defeated more than ten times their number, but because of its far reaching effect upon the worlds civilization. At the close of that remarkable conflict the surviving Grecians took a solemn vow that annually they would meet around the graves of those who fell and offer sacrifices over their sacred dust. Mounds were raised over the brave and illustrious dead and the soil of Platea became a second Holy Land. Thither embassies every year came from the states of Greece to offer sacrifices. They taught their children to uncover their heads and remove their sandals when they approached that sacred place, and so great was the love of the people for those who died that when the aged warrior who had stemmed the tide of Oriental barbarism and saved the very life of Greece, beheld for the last time the sun fading in the west, young men and maidens were to be seen renewing upon the altars of Platea that holy fire whose fervent heat should quicken the hearts of every Athenian with affection for his patriotic ancestors. So faithfully did the children

of Greece renew and keep the pledge of their fathers that the great Plutarch tells us of witnessing the 600th memorial service. In the coming years shall it be written on history's tell-tale page that the children of Greece knew how to be more grateful than the youth of this republic, heirs to a priceless heritage; and shall it be chronicled by some future historian that with the expiring throb of the last survivor of the great Grand Armies that marched with Sherman to the sea, and received the sword of Lee at Appomattox, the memorial service dedicated to our nation's heroes died also? Those who fought at Marathon secured for mankind the intellectual treasures of Athens; the growth of free institutions; the liberal enlightenment of the Western world, and the gradual ascendency for many ages of the great principles of European civilization, but those who fought in later years the battles of our Union not only secured a lasting peace to this beloved land, but struck the shackles of slavery from more than four million human beings entitled to all the rights which God's creatures should enjoy; they made the Declaration of Independence, that "all men are created equal," a living truth; they made it possible to exercise the right of free speech throughout all this land; they made this country, which was only free in name, free in truth and in fact, and secured free government for future generations. I believe that most of our people appreciate all the results of the war and desire to do their whole duty in venerating the memory of those who fell in the cause of liberty; they have not only raised mounds over the hallowed dust, but many of the states, as well as the national government, have made generous appropriations to erect monuments to the valor of our departed comrades. The chisel of the sculptor has imbued with life inanimate marble, and the monuments at Gettysburg and Atlanta breathe out a nation's gratitude. We not only admire but commend these patriotic efforts to keep before the youth of our country the noble sacrifices made for the cause of liberty, and the preservation of the Union.

Yet neither "storied urn, nor animated bust," however

beautiful or costly, can perform the duties incumbent on the people of this Republic. If the time shall ever come when marble slab or granite shaft shall be all that is left to remind the American people of their obligations to those we honor today, then indeed shall they have died in vain. But that time will never come! When monuments shall have crumbled to dust, wherever a heart shall be found that beats to the transports of patriotism and liberty, its aspiration shall be to claim kindred with the spirits of our heroic dead.

It seems fitting on a day like this, when young and old are assembled to attest their devotion to country that we should dwell on themes that may inspire us with loftier views of life and more fervent zeal for the institutions under which we live. The average American citizen of today, on whom rests the burden of civil and political affairs, has but little time or inclination to seriously consider absorbing questions of vital importance to us all. Visions of wealth or preferment or the betterment of his condition engross his waking hours. He does not comprehend the fact that he is one of the rulers of this great nation clothed with many of the powers of a king, that presidents and governors are but his creation and his servants, and that the people are supreme.

Matters of the gravest importance demand today the patriotic consideration of every intelligent citizen. The strife between capital and labor; the abandonment or continuance of our educational system; the subordination to and respect for civil law, and the enforcement of the 15th Amendment to our National Constitution, are matters which, if unheeded, may assume such phases and proportions as shall again test the strength of our government.

Blessed as we are with a country rich in nature's wealth, whose shores on either side are washed by an ocean inviting the commerce of the world; whose geographical position brings it within the temperate zone, making it the most suitable abiding place for man, we cannot understand why murmurings of discontent should be heard within our borders. With a government without a taint of despotism, where the people make their own laws; a

government founded upon the broadest principles of individual rights, which has brought greater blessings to this people than any other country has ever known, we cannot understand why anarchy should raise its baneful head and find any place to nurture its noisome brood. With an educational system unsurpassed, upon which rests the very life and stability of our government, we fail to realize why it should not receive the united loyal support of all good citizens. I am not unmindful of the fact that the best intellects are engaged in the solution of these problems so full of interest. Yet, after all, it will be reserved for the loyal thinking masses to find a way to avert any threatened danger.

Thirty-five years ago questions of state rights and human slavery and kindred questions agitated the politicians of our country. Had the masses of our people given these questions the intelligent consideration they deserved at the proper time, I am constrained to believe that war might have been averted and the lives of 1,000,000 of the flower of American manhood been spared. Indifference to American citizenship permitted evils to fester and grow upon the body politic until the usual remedies were found inadequate.

Having lived so long under the demoralizing influence of human slavery war became inevitable, and seemed not only a necessity to purify our political atmosphere and teach us that we were drifting away from the moorings of freedom, but more especially to elevate us to a higher plane of civilization. The freedom of which we then boasted was rather a jealousy of our own rights than a reverence for the rights of others.

We lacked humanity. We unconsciously inflicted gross wrongs. We wronged the Indian; we enslaved the Negro. We professed to vouchsafe free speech to all, and yet we heard unmoved the howling of the brutal mob who thirsted for the blood of him who dared to speak in defense of the liberty of the Negro. The fire of conflict gave us broader views of freedom, and as the smoke cleared away from the fields of carnage on which lay our martyred dead, we learned the lessons which war

alone could teach. We learned that war with all its horrors can develop the grandest natures the world has ever seen. "It developed courage, that sublime energy of the soul, which defies the universe when it feels itself to be in the right. It developed self-sacrifice, which repudiates the idea that our life is worth more than anything else, when for a principle it throws that life away as if to say: It is not necessary that I live, but it is necessary that right should triumph. It developed magnanimity, that spirit which prompted us to not only extend mercy but food and raiment to a fallen foe. Who does not know that most of us on both sides of the struggle became mightier and larger and grander in our natures from the education received by our great civil war."

As the clouds rolled away from each battle-field, we realized that war frequently comes as the refiner of the universe, before which all illusions, all unrealities fade away. We beheld truths that had never appeared to us before. Many of us regarded the Negro only as an animal, fit to be purchased and sold and used as a chattel. At Miliken's Bend and Fort Pillow, in the flash of musketry and roar of cannon, the truth dawned upon us that we had wronged him, and as the war progressed, we were sure we had. The children of Israel fled before the avenging ire of Pharaoh's army, and the kind billows of the Red Sea delivered them from their oppressors, but the American Negros, after nearly 250 years of degrading bondage, bravely stood before their former masters and fought with a heroism worthy of freemen. To this, history furnishes no parallel. A peace-loving people, we abhorred war; yet our achievements in literature, science, art and agriculture in the past twenty-five years can be traced almost directly to its results.

The thunder of cannon aroused us from lethargy to activity. Activity in agriculture; the wilderness became a fair garden. Activity in manufactures; the name American became synonomous with invention, and the wildest dreams of Franklin were realized in the discoveries of Edison. Activity in art; each home became a temple for the beautiful in sculpture, painting and music, and re-

finement made its appearance where nature's rustic rudeness once held sway. Science removed from our eyes the scales, and the sons and daughters of this land advanced in a decade farther than their ancestors had in the preceding century. But above and beyond the benefits accruing to our common country and underlying all, that which challenges our admiration most was the unselfish patriotism of the Union soldier.

When a complete history shall record his deeds, his unselfish devotion to country shall stand as the brightest attribute of his character. The Roman soldier under Caesar fought for the spoils of conquest. The Persian army under Xerxes marched out as slaves under the guidance of a master, and one part of the army plied the lash to make the other perform its duty. Napoleon's army was largely made up of men dragged from their homes by conscription, and fought to make their idol master of the world. Even the English armies are composed of men who in time of peace make war a study and a trade; but the Union army was made up of men from the active pursuits of peaceful industry, who, leaving the anvil, the plow and the pen, and bidding farewell to those they held most dear, gave up all to volunteer at their country's call, that they might secure to future generations the blessings of free government. Greater love hath no man for his country than this. Scholars and statesmen may plead and write for her, but the citizen who offers his life to his country in the hour of her imminent peril, has ever occupied and will continue to occupy the highest place in the affections of his countrymen. Though three-quarters of a century has passed away since Waterloo, who stand higher in the affections of the English people than the heroes of that sanguinary battle?

We would remember all today whose voices, though hushed in death, still speak to us from the tomb more eloquently than tongue or pen. With conscious pride we refer to those whose names no longer designate or individualize them. They are the great "unknown," who fell where they fought. One hundred and forty-eight thousand of these sleep in our National Cemeteries, but

these are not all. Though we cannot tell what their ancestry may have been; whether they first saw the light in luxury or squalor, they are still ours, their memory is enshrined in our hearts and shall continue to live in our affections.

"Bring the flowers; deck the heroes'
Graves from ocean shore to shore.
Theirs the lives which paid the ransom,
Ours to reap, their labors o'er."

"Peace! the Hand that made creation
Still doth guard his offspring's dust;
Flowers grow, while breezes o'er them,
Waft the birds' sweet song of trust."

We speak of our honored dead and our thoughts involuntarily revert to those who fell resisting the charge at Gettysburg; who scaled the heights at Fredericksburg never to return again; who met a glorious death while fighting above the clouds at Lookout Mountain, or returned home wounded and shattered to sicken and die. But we would also place the immortelle today upon the graves of those who made the organization and maintenance of the Union army possible. We would place the flower of remembrance on the graves of the American mothers, who laid broad and deep the foundations of liberty and inspired their sons with noble aims and lofty views of patriotism; who in the hour of our country's peril laid on its altar those dearer to them than life itself, and like Abraham of old, asked not why the unnatural sacrifice was demanded; who with womanly fortitude blessed God that they had given their sons, even though in the shock of battle He might reclaim his own. We would lay the garland of flowers today upon the graves of those who, like sweet ministering angels, in camp and hospital, moistened the parched lips or cooled the fevered brow. We would bless and hallow the memory of all the noble women, who by word and deed and offices of love inspired our flagging zeal, and nerved our weary arms.

They were patriots all; and the time will come when justice will be done them; when the records of their unselfish deeds shall be gathered into history's golden urn, as a priceless heritage for the daughters of this goodly land of ours.

As the scene of this most terrible tragedy of our country recedes from view with the years, coming generations will continue to appreciate the services of the men and women who were the actors in this great conflict; and as around the hearth the story is told, it will be an inspiration to each one to do something for his country's good.

Let the teacher remember that it was such as he who taught the American soldier the history of his country; who spoke to him, when a youth, of Bennington and Bunker Hill, of the suffering army at Valley Forge; of the midnight advance of Washington and his men in mid winter across the Delaware. Let the teacher remember that his patriotic services are as essential in the little temple of American liberty (the public school house over which he presides) as the soldier's services in the field, and as the color guard of noble youth shall raise towards heaven this sacred emblem where eager winds shall unfold its beauties, and loyal sunbeams kiss its silvery stars, think not the labor lost if he shall explain its emblematic meaning.

Let him tell them that in a few years the great Grand Armies of Grant and Sherman and Sheridan will all be sleeping the sleep that knows no waking, and that into their hands will be consigned the care and keeping of that flag with all it implies and adjure them to guard it well, for what it represents was purchased at fearful cost. Above all, teach them to be honest, not only to themselves but to their country. Tell them of the integrity of men of former days, when Major Andre's British gold was unable to purchase a freeman's honor. Show them also that although the enemy appears not in martial array to menace our institutions, a more dangerous and insidious foe is ever present,—corruption's gilded hand is ever stretched forth to tear down the American flag. To

the teachers of the public schools, and those best of all teachers, the mothers of this land, must we look for succor from this dreaded enemy. Unless the American youth shall be taught that the worst of criminals and traitors, is the man who accepts a bribe or steals from the public coffers when intrusted with the confidence of his fellow citizens, then, indeed, shall history repeat itself; and self-government must prove a failure.

Let the ministers, the priests of God, who are also teachers, remember this; and let them bear in mind that neither they nor such as they manned the guns that thundered at the battles for the Union, for like the master they serve, they come to preach peace and good will on earth, yet it was their fervid eloquence that helped to swell the ranks of our shattered armies, and their cheering words that nerved our arm to "Strike for God and Home and Native Land." Let them remember that eternal vigilance is still the price of liberty, and to them is intrusted the task of keeping the springs and fountains of our civil and political as well as our social life, sweet and pure.

The press, that mighty agency in a free land, which, with the pulpit, wields the greatest influence for good, must receive support only when it shall teach men to be loyal to free government and to be true to their own manhood.

Let each citizen of the Republic keep it ever before him, however humble his lot, that he can if he will, be a potent force in assisting to solve the great problem of our Nation's destiny.

Surely there is need of patriotic action if we are to avoid the dangers that threaten us, and expect to assimilate the heterogenous element that, each year confounding liberty with license, land upon our shores to test the fabric of our government and threaten our national life. Yet let us hope that, as in the past, a kind providence has guided our affairs, so shall we still find brave hearts and strong arms in the hour of our adversity.

Conscious of the rectitude of our past efforts we, with pardonable pride, approach the close of the grand est century in all history. No other century has been fraught

with so many incidents affecting the welfare of our race. From its beginning to the present time, the march of civilization has been onward and upward. Pregnant of activity, it has been rich in results. Theories have given way to realities, and nature has so far succumbed to the investigations of science as to raise the query whether the days of miracles have passed. Productive of genius, the coming century has become its debtor for magnificent achievements in literature, science and art. Yet, to our mind, its crowning glory consists not in its inventions or discoveries, but in its resistance to aggressive tyranny; the abolishment of slavery; the protection and maintenance of free institutions, and the advancement of woman to her true position in social life. Honored above all other inhabitants of the earth, happy in the consciousness that Providence has guided and controlled us, should the American citizen feel when he reflects that of all the nations of the world, this Republic, even with its devastating civil war, has made the greatest advancement. Having demonstrated to the world that a government of the people, by the people, and for the people, is more enduring than that based on the so-called "divine right of kings." thrones are tottering and coronets are falling from uneasy heads.

Liberty with magic stylus has engraved over the portals of the palace of royalty the ominous word "decay." Too intelligent longer to continue the puppet or plaything of a king, France becomes a Republic, and immediately the revulsion among her people tends to the highest prosperity. Brazil, following her wise example, gives glad promise of future greatness. Thus shall the good work go on until the clouds of ignorance and oppression are dispelled by the warm sunshine of humanity and popular education. Then, and then only, may we hope that whatever differences born of rapacity and human passions shall arise among nations, reason shall prevail and the methods of peace triumph over brutish force.

Comrades of the Grand Army, as the sunset of life approaches, we would solve the hidden mysteries of futurity. We would look even with finite eyes beyond the peaks

that limit the horizon of our vision and catch some glimpses of the hills and vales beyond. But this cannot be. What is in store for our beloved land none can tell. Yet no superhuman means are necessary to aid us in foretelling the effect upon our country of the gathering at scenes like this we witness today. Nor do we need the voice of seer or prophet to tell us that this is but the presage of the dawning of a brighter, happier day, when each patriotic act performed and each noble sentiment uttered shall have made its impress on our race wherever found; when liberty in every land shall have become enthroned and "man's heaven-erected form adorned with the smiles of love and peace and sweet content." Then shall the hovel of serf and peasant be known no more, yet straw thatched hut, with liberty as a guest, shall be as a palace for nature's king.

And as the cycling years roll on, beloved spirits shall hover near to catch the sweet strains of some grand "Gloria in Excelsis" wafted heavenward from the shrines of liberty throughout the world. And though with the years our faces shall have faded from memory, and all that we now see and hear and love shall have changed, still let us indulge the hope that with the glad springtime Columbia's grateful children will meet around this flag to sing praises to the God of Freedom and strew the graves of our illustrious dead with nature's choicest flowers.

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